

## County to Publish Names of Those Who Owe Court

By SUE LATUSZEK

Officials with the 26th Circuit Court soon will try a new and creative way to collect fees owed by defendants — publishing their names in the local newspaper.

“We’ve been attempting to get some of these bench warrants cleared up for a long time now,” said Sarah LaFleche, senior juvenile officer for the juvenile division of the court.

Many of those people no longer reside at the address on file with the court and attempts to locate them have been unsuccessful.

Beginning Oct. 6, LaFleche and Circuit Court/County Clerk Bonnie Friedrichs will publish the names, birthdates and last known city of residence for defendants who have had a bench warrant issued for their arrest for failure to pay such things as court fees, restitution and cost of care fees.

Friedrichs said many pertain to old cases dating back to the mid-1990s.

“It’s time to get these cleared up,” she said.

The list will be published along with phone numbers and e-mail addresses for contacting the court. Those who can’t pay their costs in full may set up a payment plan with the court. Readers who recognize names on the list and have current, correct contact information for them are encouraged to contact the court as well.

“We don’t expect them to pay the whole amount,” LaFleche said. “We just want a correct address and payment plans. We’re willing to work with people.”

Although some owe less than \$100, the juvenile division has some who owe up to \$25,000. The total costs owed to that division by people who have bench warrants issued is approximately \$130,000 between the two counties it covers, Alpena and Montmorency, LaFleche said.

LaFleche said these debts never go away, as there is no statute of limitations on how long the court has to collect costs. In addition to issuing a bench warrant, officials can revoke a defendants driver’s license for failure to pay and even garnish income tax returns.

Approximately 100 names will be published Oct. 6. Friedrichs said she and LaFleche plan to update the list and publish it the first Saturday of each month.

To avoid having their name published, defendants may contact the county clerk's or juvenile division office by Oct. 1 to pay their debt or set up a payment plan.

"We're here to help in any way we can," Friedrichs said. "All we ask is you come in, notify us, keep your address current and make an effort."

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